DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 282 267 CS 505 614

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TITLE Communications and International Business: Focusing General Education on the Needs of International Business.
PUB DATE [86]
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (37th, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, May 21-25, 1987).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Business Communication; *Business Education; Class Activities; Community Colleges; Cultural Awareness; *Curriculum Development; Foreign Culture; *Instructional Innovation; Program Development; Role of Education; *School Business Relationship; Speech Communication; Student Needs; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Coastline Community College CA; *International Business Education

ABSTRACT

The communications and international business program at Coastline Community College in California focuses on the use of curricula experiments and instructional innovations to update general education and vocational courses to meet the training needs of international business people in the area. Local business executives whose companies were involved in international trade were surveyed for suggested topics to be included in an international program. Most respondents were interested in comparative cultures and in dealing with problems that arise in typical cross cultural settings. Interest in a certificate rather than a degree program was high, and Coastline scheduled credit and non-credit courses at a variety of times and locations and in diverse formats to allow students to study while continuing full-time employment. In addition to courses specifically dealing with international business--the intercultural communication course in the Speech Communication area--was revised, revitalizing its general education and liberal arts curriculum. Traditional curricula were maintained while innovative methodology was implanted, including (1) the use of business oriented media to illustrate cultural similarities and differences, (2) extensive use of role-playing in order to illustrate specific cultural patterns and effects on intercultural communication, and (3) lecture and discussion using examples from business and industrial settings. This "mixed approach" holds the best chance of success in meeting the needs of international business people--the ultimate goal is to become a permanent training/education partner with the international business community. (NKA)

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COMMUNICATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS:

FOCUSING GENERAL EDUCATION ON THE NEEDS OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

by

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COASTLINE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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COMMUNICATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS:

FOCUSING GENERAL EDUCATION ON THE NEEDS OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

Coastline Community College, with financial support from the U.S. Department of Education, implemented a program in 1986 designed to infuse international studies into the college's liberal arts and vocational curricula. This new program was funded by a Title VI-B grant and focused on the use of curricula experiments and instructional innovations which would address the revitalizing of general education and vocational courses to meet the training needs of international business people within Orange County, California. Planning for the program began when both faculty and administrators at Coastline Community College recognized that while Coastline had a strong program in foreign languages, it had no courses in international business and little knowledge of the volume of international business conducted in Orange County. An operational plan was developed which called for the achievement of four major goals: (1) to conduct a needs assessment and create a network of international business contacts, (2) to create credit-free workshops in specific international business areas to be offerred through the Community Services division of the college, (3) to develop new international courses for credit which will transfer to four-year colleges and (4) to restructure the basic intercultural communication course to include global topics related to business.

The first step was an effort to gather information regarding the future training needs of businesses engaged in international trade. The challenge was: how to do it? The idea of sending a survey form through the mail was discarded almost immediately. Instead, a telephone survey technique was designed which accomplished several objectives simultaneously: (1) responses were immediately recorded, (2) a resource list was compiled to assist with building an international data base, (3) additional contacts were made to add to our census and (4) particular issues and questions could be fully explored and recorded.

One-hundred and fifty-five of those receiving a survey responded. Seventy-four percent of the respondents were involved directly in international trade either through manufacturing or service occupation such as law and accounting. The remainder were executives from companies who probably should have been involved

in international business but for a variety of reasons were staying away from foreign trade. These were the most difficult organizations to select since it was often hard to qualify them as companies which "ought to be but weren't" doing international business. Nearly forty percent of those responding were either presidents, CEO's, or sole proprietors of their organizations. Another twenty-seven percent were vice presidents and the remaining were division managers or directors. About a quarter of those surveyed reported that half of their compan s income came from international sales. Sixty percent of this sample were employed by companies with twenty-five employees or less.

Nearly all of those responding indicated a strong interest in either taking a course or a seminar in international business. The following is a ranking which the respondents gave to a long list of suggested topics for inclusion in an international program: (1) international transportation and distribution--70%, (2) international marketing--68%, (3) international finance--57%, (4) cultures and traditions--52%, (5) international law--44% and (6) international taxation--35%. Respondents were also asked to name the countries with which they planned to do business. Countries most frequently mentioned were: (1) People's Republic of China--37%, (2) United Kingdom--22%, (3) Japan--21%, (4) West Germany--15%, (5) France--13% and (6) Mexico--12%.

The response about countries with wh h respondents planned to do international business was similar to the list of countries with wh h these companies are currently doing business. Australia and South Korea are the two countries which were mentioned in the list of c rrent business countries but are missing from the list of countries where companies are planning to do business. This response surprized the researchers since our perception had been that both of these countries command a great deal of attention from Orange County businesses.

Training in foreign languages was not seen as a great need by the chief executives of most companies. Several mentioned that they use foreign nationals or simply hire people already possessing language skills to operate in areas where a particular language was a necessity. Unfortunately missing was any reference to the concept that the learning of a foreign language can bring with it a host of cultural skills and a "cultural sense" which, though hard to identify, can pay large dividentds for a company. About twenty-five percent of the sample said they would be interested in some "survival" language classes in Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, or French. The interest was about equal in each language.

There was not much interest amongst this sample in a two-year degree program in international business but there was strong interest in a certificate program composed of three to five classes. Thirty-four percent of the respondents said they would enroll in such a certificate program and sixty-one percent said they would recommend the program to the company's employees.

Perhaps the most valuable accomplishment of the survey was in the area of curriculum development. Coastline's faculty gained realistic and practical insights into the wants and needs of the Orange County international business community. One conclusion that the business faculty reached suggested that general education poses significant problems for business since industry is often short-sighted about its educational needs. For example, as previously mentioned, foreign languages were not seen as a need by the chief operating officers of nearly all the companies responding to the survey. Foreign language problems are somthing which they delagate to interpretors. It will probably take an extended period to persuade company executives that they can be much more effective if they "make the effort" to communicate in the host language where business is being transacted.

In contrast, most of the companies with which we spoke were interested in comparative cultures and in dealing with problems that arise in typical cross-cultural settings. Hence, with respect to curriculum development, we began our program with brief (three week) international business practice courses to address their perceived immediate needs. Coastline maintains the long-range goal of convincing these executives later that foreign language training and other general education courses can also be very useful in solving intercultural problems.

Coastline also scheduled credit and non-credit courses at a variety of times and locations to assist students to take classes while continuing full-time employment. Classes are scheduled in a variety of formats: (1) Survey of International Business and Introduction to Intercultural Communication--18 weeks, (2) Transportation and Distribution and International Finance--6 weeks and (3) International Contracts, Importing, Chinese Business Practice and Korean Business Practice--3 weeks. Three instructional formats are utilized in an attempt to meet diverse needs demonstrated by our needs assessment instrument. Survey of International Business 100 is an 18-week, three credit course which will transfer to four-year colleges. Introduction to Intercultural Communication is also 18-week and serves as the basic communication transfer requirement to the California State Universities. Transportation and Distribution 120 and International Finance 125 are one-unit classes designed

with a practical approach, short-term objectives, and a variety of guest speakers. The remaining four classes are part of Coastline's 399 series. These are short, nine-hour classes based on topical concerns of interest to the international business students. Courses offered under this format which appear to meet a continuing need are converted to a regular six, nine, or eighteen-week format. Otherwise, these classes meet a temporary need and are then discarded in favor of other topical classes which emerge each year.

In addition to these courses specifically dealing with international business the intercultural communication course in the Speech-Communication area needed revision inorder to adapt and revitalize its general education and liberal arts curriculum. The central question in this process of revision became how to maintain the core curriculum in intercultural communication and at the same time make the course attractive to students interested in international business who tend to be already employed and seeking to transfer to the international division of their company rather than transfer to a four-year university.

The emphasis of the intercultural communication course is that while particular problems regarding trade and commerce may appear unique, they actually can be solved with the application of general principles from the fields of communication and rhetoric. Intercultural, cross-cultural and interracial communication problems are viewed in light of typical international business constraints. The overall approach to the course remains a communication theory approach which focuses on the key concepts of communication theory and how they manifest in interracial, interethnic and intercultural settings. The text-book is the most widely used in the field, Samovar and Porter's (1976) Intercultural Communication: A Reader. The difference between Coastline's intercultural communiction course and many others is that this course retrieves the substance of traditional general education in speech-communication and converts that knowledge into the practical power required to compete in the international marketplace.

The substance of Coastline's intercultural communication course includes: communication definitions, models, linquistic elements, non-verbal communication, relationships, credibility and perception. The most important focus of this substance involves the specific intercultural contact and contexts found in the international business situation. While many of the other focii identified by Prosser (1974), Barna and Jain (1978) and Beebe and Biggers (1986) are included in Coastline's course, the central focus returns constantly to international

business constraints.

The question becomes how to blend the practicality of vocational courses which specifically prepare students for cross-cultural business situations and creative thinking of liberal arts courses which tend to teach the student a general system of analysis that applies to any situation involving communication between people from different cultures. The answer for Coastline's intercultural communication course was to maintain traditional curricula while using innovative methodology. Methods of instruction for the intercultural course includes: (1) the use of business oriented media to illustrate cultural similarities and differences between ethnic groups and cultures, (2) extensive use of role-playing inorder to illustrate specific cultural patterns and effects on intercultural communication and (3) lecture and discuss using examples from business and industrial settings.

Audio-visual materials proved to be a useful method for integrating general principles of intercultural communication into specific business settings. Although a specific film might deal with a single foreign culture, the class would focus on an area of communication research inorder to analyze the film. So while watching a film about industrial, agricultural and urban growth in China, the class might key on the nonverbal behavior of the participants. Thus, students take away specific knowledges about China and also gain practice in application of analytical tools.

The following is a partial list of films that have proved useful in the Coastline intercultural communication class:

China Under Communism B/W, 22min., MP-2362
Communication: The Nonverbal Agenda Color, 33min., ISBN 0-07-106681-0
Doing Business in Japan Color, 35 min., MP-4141
Growing Up Japanese Color, 25 min., MP-3054
Saudi Arabia: Oil, Money & Politics Color, 60 min., TV 1377

Films such as these proved useful in framing class discussion on the values, perceptions and communication behaviors of foreign cultures. Class discussion always focused on how intercultural problems affect international trade.

The use of case-studies and simulations to generate student role-playing also serves as an integral dimension of the Coastline intercultural communication course. Role-anticipation and role-enactment allow students to analyze both students' assumptions about other cultures as well as allowing students to examine their own cultural expectations. Students often create role-playing situations from hypothetical case studies that they create connected to a particular culture that they are studying. By creating hypothetical case studies, stud ents identify

the underlying values of specific cultures, as well as the problems that often arise when people from different cultures interact. The following three examples are case studies that were created by Coastline students to be role-played in class. Each case study generates problems that involve intercultural communication (i.e., linguistic variables, identity and status, historical and political climates, social values and struture, economic trends, technolgical language vocabularies, nonverbal communication, family/friends, employment skill and company policies) as applied to the international trade situation.

Business representatives from IBM have a final contract prepared to integrate IBM's existing computer hardware into the Mitsushita Electric Company's computer line. The computers from IBM are built and ready to be shipped to Japan. The only step left in the negotiation process is the final "O.K." from Mitsushita and then the final agreement will be signed and the computers shipped. American representatives in Japan present the contract to the management at the Mitsushita plant. Managers at Mitsushita accept the contract and say to the Americans that they will present the contract to their executive committee and then they will inform the American businesspeople about shipment. The Americans expect this response and they return to America.

After two months pass another opportunity arises for IBM to sell the computers in question and since no response has come from Mitsushita, the computers are sold. Soon after, the President of Mitsushita calls and gives the "O.K." on the contract for the computers. He is told that the computers were sold because of the delay in response from the Japanese. The Americans inferred that because of the long delay that the Japanese company no longer needed the computers. Mitsushita responded that they would no longer do business with IBM.

A Japanese management consultant has been sent from the Mitsubishu car company to Chrysler Corporation for talks with senior management about how employee production might be improved. The Japanese consultant recommends that he spend atleast two weeks studying the American company before filing his report.

The first evening of the visit the management at Chrysler requests that the Japanese consultant accompany some high-level exectives to dinner. During dinner the Americans question the consultant about new incentive programs and other Japanese innovations, but the consultant seems unwilling to respond. The second evening has the same result--no business is accomplished, much to the chagrin of the Americans. After many evenings of entertaining, the American representatives grow impatient and suggest to the Japanese representative that since "our time together is limited it might be a good idea to talk about business soon." The Japanese representative seems much disturbed by what he sees as a major breach of etiquet.

John Smith, of American Business Corporation, was entertaining a client, Alfonso Giorgianni, from Olivetti Corporation of Italy. John scheduled a business luncheon for noon at the Quick and Easy Sandwich Shop which was a few blocks from Alfonso's hotel. John arrived promptly at 12:00 and waited in the foyer for his client. At approximately 12:45 Alfonso arrived. John, who had become annoyed

> after using up forty-five minutes of his one hour lunch, greeted Alfonso shortly and proceeded to rush him to an open table and browse the menu for a quick sandwich selection. Alfonso expressed his displeasure with the menu choices because they did not offer any substantial lunch fares--only snacks and light supper items. He also complained that the atmosphere left much to be desired in that it did not provide the relaxing, leisurely mid-day break he was accustome to. Needless to say, the business discussion was not productive, and neither person walked away with the deal they had intended to make.

These and other role playing situations create another opportunity for students to gain a deeper perspective of intercultural problems.

Finally, by emphasizing the connection between general concepts and specific business settings in lecture and discussion students begin to recognize that a balance between general education and specific training can yield performance dividends. This is true in the class-room and this sort of balance can help companies achieve their goals if chief executives are willing to become long-term oriented.

This strategy of balancing general education and specific business training has worked well at Coastline. The response of our adult part-time student population has been enthusiastic. Instructors report that students are displaying a keen interest in the cultural questions which underlie many of the specific and immediate issues which they encounter daily on-the-job. Moreover, the same students are supporting the entire range of curricula within international business and Speech-Communication which creates a cammaraderie amongst the students.

We now believe that this "mixed approach" holds the best chance of success in meeting not only the perceived needs of international business people but their less apparent needs as well. It is a frustrating juxtaposition of short-term training requests on the one hand, and long term academic prescriptions on the other. The ultimate goal is to become a permanent training/education partner with the international business community. They have shown by their support of programs at the University of Southern California and Thunderbird University that they are willing to commit to substantial plans of study. The business community simply needs to be shown, thorough, substantive and practical examples of what outcomes they can expect as a result of the educative process. Coastline believes that our international business and intercultural communication courses can help meet the training needs of the international business people with Orange County, California.

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